

tower of babel

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76376931) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76376931>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Episode: s01e05 I'll Believe in Anything (Heated Rivalry) , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , the phone call scene reimaged
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-25 Words: 1,482 Chapters: 1/1

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by [girlflowered](#)

Summary

"How about you tell me everything that's on your mind but in Russian? I won't understand but maybe it'll help?"

Ilya never speaks his mind in English, not really. Besides, feelings don't really have a place in this dance they've been doing for years. Shane discovered that easily enough on the couch in Ilya's house, flayed open under his gaze by a single utterance of his first name. He bolted like a spooked horse before the afterglow could even set in.

But God, what if Shane could finally get a real glimpse into it? To see what Ilya won't tell him, can't tell him? The emotions he keeps buried so deep under the *Hollanders* and that asshole persona?

Before he can think better of it, Shane pulls up his Google Translate app.

or, a re-imagining of the phone call confession in episode 5

Notes

this fic inspired by pirated files without subtitles. i was playing the russian scenes into my laptop mic for google translate to work its magic on, and then thought "shit what if Shane did the same thing in episode 5?"

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

“Hey, uh, I have an idea. How about you tell me everything that’s on your mind but in Russian? I won’t understand but maybe it’ll help?”

A horrible idea creeps up on Shane as he speaks, crawling into his brain like an ugly insect. He pulls his phone from his ear and stares at the smudged screen, the little speaker phone icon under “Lily” staring at him accusingly. Ilya never speaks his mind in English, not really. Shane doesn’t blame him. Emotions are hard enough for him to articulate in his own mother tongue; he can’t imagine trying to wrangle the tangled knot of feelings he holds for Ilya into a second language.

Besides, feelings don’t really have a place in this dance they’ve been doing for years. Shane discovered that easily enough on the couch in Ilya’s house, flayed open under his gaze by a single utterance of his first name. He bolted like a spooked horse before the afterglow could even set in.

But God, what if Shane could finally get a real glimpse into it? To see what Ilya won’t tell him, can’t tell him? The emotions he keeps buried so deep under the *Hollanders* and that asshole persona?

“Okay.” Ilya agrees. Shane blinks. He hadn’t really been expecting Ilya to go along with it.

Before he can think better of it, Shane pulls up his Google Translate app. Hands trembling a bit, he sets the option to "Russian" and clicks the microphone icon to transcribe. Doubt is just starting to set in when Ilya's voice crackles through the speaker, flooding the screen with Cyrillic characters. English words appear below them. The words settle when Ilya pauses between sentences, the technology flickering between verb tenses like ticker tape.

“I never want to come back here again. I fucking hate it here. And they all fucking hate me. I pay for everything.”

Shane's chest tightens as he watches Ilya unknowingly pour his heart out to him onto the screen.

“I want more, Ilya. I need more, Ilya, more more more. And I have nothing for these people. I give them everything but I feel fucking empty. They don’t care. They look at me and they see a bank. Or an enemy.”

His face twists in despair as Shane drinks in the words. He shifts uncomfortably on the cement stairs, metal railing pressing into his back. He knew Ilya's family situation wasn't great, but Christ, he didn't know it was this bad. Ilya is both the cash cow and the scapegoat. The perfect son and the disappointment. Shane thinks back to the mezzanine at the Olympics, where his weak attempts at support were met with icy rejection. He feels a bit guilty in retrospect.

Shane's family has always been a refuge for him; his parents were his number one support since the beginning of his hockey career. They had attended almost every one of his games since he was 10. Hell, his mom pushed for that Rolex deal harder than he did. Shane couldn’t

imagine what it would be like as a professional hockey player without the support of his parents. Difficult, sure, but more importantly, isolating. Ilya really had no one in his corner.

Ilya echoes that miserable realization immediately.

“And it means I have no one now.”

“Well, not no one. I have.....Svetlana. And I love her.”

Shane grimaces slightly, remembering Ilya’s awkward boasts about his conquests. He knew Ilya could have anyone he wants. Who wouldn’t want him, his golden curls flying and sharp teeth flashing in that rare smile? Maybe Ilya had finally found someone who could be real with him, for him.

But Shane sees Ilya’s next words appear one-by-one on the screen and his lungs freeze in his chest. Heart pounding, he reads it again.

“But not like.....fuck me. But not like I love you.”

Shane’s stomach drops. He sits upright on the stairs, clutching the phone. Blood rushes to his head and his ears ring as he drifts out of his body. Ilya continues, unaware of Shane’s world turning on its axis.

“That’s the worst fucking part of all this is.....that all I want is you. It’s always you. I’m so in love with you and I don’t know what to do about it.”

For a moment, this revelation comes crashing over Shane like a tidal wave, flushing out doubt and replacing it with the warm knowledge that Ilya loves him. *Ilya loves him.*

The phone drops with a clatter as Shane covers his face and tries to focus on his breathing. A traitorous smile fights its way across his cheeks.

Ilya is thousands of miles away in Moscow, grieving his father. He’s handling all the tedious responsibilities of finances and funeral planning and food. Across the world, he is shouldering the weight of his entire ungrateful family—and yet the thing plaguing him is *how helplessly he loves Shane*. Ilya had called him to be his confidante, in his moment of crisis, with nowhere else to go.

Distantly, the logical part of Shane hopes that Ilya is alone. And of course he is—Ilya wouldn’t be talking so freely if he weren’t—but the anxiety that has plagued Shane since the Sochi Olympics still remains. Moscow is not safe for Ilya. It never has been.

Ilya had been so adamant that they couldn’t be anything more, always so guarded in his affections outside of sex; save for that one shining moment where Shane got to hold him as he cried. Shane didn’t dare to let himself hope for anything then. He had just tried to savor the moment, breathing in the scent of Ilya’s shampoo and rocking him gently on the hotel bed.

Now Shane can feel hope, small yet sparkling, rising in his chest. Maybe they could be something. Maybe that spark of connection could grow into a flame, without fear of burning

down their relationships. Ilya hates his family anyway, he said so himself at the beginning of this one-sided conversation.

“Okay, I’m done,” Ilya finishes plainly, tone dry like he didn’t just pour his heart out to Shane.

But he hadn’t, not really. Shane’s hand pauses in its venture to the phone, guilt slithering cold into his stomach. Ilya had said all of that to himself in his mother tongue as a private confession. He only said it because he trusted that no one could hear or understand. And Shane had betrayed that trust.

He had just wanted to understand where Ilya was coming from—fuck, he had just wanted to help. He heard the stress of the whispered phone calls Ilya took from his apartment in Boston, frustration bleeding through the thick syllables of Russian as he paced. Shane wanted to listen, to be there for Ilya, to be the support he clearly needed. But now Shane knows everything. He knows too much. He knows and has to pretend that he doesn’t.

"Are you there?" Ilya's voice bounces off the concrete walls of the stairwell. Shane swallows, throat clicking, and raises the phone to his ear.

"Yeah, I'm still here. Do you feel better?" he asks shakily, desperately trying to pretend like he didn’t understand every word.

"Yes, thank you," Ilya says shortly, blunt English giving Shane whiplash after the outpouring of feelings in Russian. He wishes they could be on that same level. He wishes they could have the same natural comfort in communication, no language barrier, words from the heart with no societal conventions in between them.

“Maybe you could teach me Russian someday,” Shane blurts out, then buries his face in his free hand. Fuck, he’s way too obvious.

Ilya snorts. “Yeah, okay. Only useful phrases, like 'harder', 'please', 'yes sir'.”

“Fuck you.” Shane says weakly, rubbing his forehead, relieved by the normal banter.

Elation and guilt war inside him as they say their goodbyes. Ilya agrees to text him when he’s back in the country, grumbling good-naturedly about how Shane is “worse than his mother was” the whole time.

Shane’s smile fades as he slips the phone into his pocket and stands up, groaning a bit as he stretches his legs. Montreal plays Boston in a few weeks; he just has to act normal until that next game is over. Until then, Ilya can’t know that Shane understood the whole speech. Shane is a terrible fucking liar, but he has to *try* to keep it under wraps.

No matter who wins the next game, Shane can go to Ilya’s hotel room after the game and explain the whole thing. He can come clean. If things go well, maybe he could even convince Ilya to come to his cottage over the summer. He just has to make sure the guilt doesn’t eat him from the inside out in the meantime.

He'd rather lose the game than lose Ilya for something this stupid.

End Notes

it only took me 10 years of an ao3 account and this show grabbing me by the THROAT to get brave enough to write and post. this is the first fic i have ever written, so please be nice, but let me know what you think!

(i have not read the books so if you see any inconsistencies, no you didn't)

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